

Organization

June 2019



GEORGIA VOCATIONAL
REHABILITATION AGENCY

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Everything in Order

By Executive Director Shawn Ryan



Whether you're replacing a car's transmission, cooking dinner or writing an individualized plan for employment, processes are a part of everything we do. You wouldn't install new car parts before removing defective ones or frost a cake before it's baked. Every task, no matter how adept you are in the subject area, requires some kind of order, planning and forethought.

"But my work is usually qualitative, not quantitative."

"We take on tasks as needed. Every day is different."

"The process varies every time."

Statements like those above are often true, particularly in industries with a human services component. However, it's important for each of us to remember there are benefits and yes, necessity, to established procedures and clear metrics.

Documenting the method behind a function assists coworkers in training, ensures steps aren't skipped and gives you proof of a work product even if the project is seemingly intangible. You will also find performance management documents (and self-evaluations too) easier if you have a yardstick to measure your efficiency and compliance.

By now, you have seen evidence that an increased focus on process improvement and performance indicators are key parts of our evolving organizational philosophy. The goal is not simply to pile more paperwork on your plate or to put individuals and departments under scrutiny for its own sake (although a consistent, solid performance will withstand scrutiny regardless). My objective is to make every encounter with Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA) as efficient, organized and productive as possible for clients. If you share in that objective, you're here for the right reason.

I look forward to the hard work ahead that will ultimately lead us to a better GVRA.

Shawn Ryan
GVRA Executive Director



Get to Know a Legislator

This Month We Feature Sam Watson



Rep. Sam Watson (R-Moultrie)

Rep. Sam Watson was elected in 2012 to represent District 172 which includes portions of Colquitt, Tift and Thomas counties. He is a farmer and agri-businessman.

Rep. Watson was raised on the family farm and graduated from Colquitt County High School in 1997. He earned his Associate's Degree from Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College and his Bachelor's Degree from the University of Georgia majoring in Agricultural Education.

He is a 2012 graduate of Leadership Georgia, a 2011 graduate of Leadership Colquitt and a 2009 graduate of the Georgia Agri-Leaders Forum.

Rep. Watson is active in his community, serving on the Colquitt County Farm Bureau Board of Directors. He is a member of the Colquitt County Cattlemen's Association and the Colquitt County Young Farmers.

Outside of his community, Rep. Watson is President of the UGA Alpha Gamma Rho Fraternity Alumni Board and a member of the Georgia Agribusiness Council and the Georgia Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association.

Rep. Watson has received numerous honors and awards. He was named as one of Georgia Trend's "Movers and Shakers in Agribusiness" in 2010 and was recently awarded the 2014 freshman legislator of the year award by the Georgia Chamber of Commerce.

Rep. Watson is married to Emily Howard Watson and they are the proud parents of two young daughters, Lily and Lucy. They live in southern Colquitt County on the family farm between Moultrie and Coolidge.

The Watsons are members of Moultrie First Baptist Church where they are active in the children's ministry, and Sam serves as a Deacon.



Removing Obstacles

A Profile of Scott Barr

By Communications Specialist Tom Connelly

Years ago, a song by the musical artist Prince included the lyrics, "We're gonna party like it's 1999." Perhaps that ought to be the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency's sentiment, too, because that is the year that Scott Barr started to work for the agency. Hired as a rehabilitation engineer, this former Michigan VR client-turned-VR-wonderkind (he has quadriplegia from a snow-skiing accident) currently serves as the AWT Team Leader for the South quadrant.

In this position, which Barr has held since 2015, he handles a multitude of responsibilities, including receiving and reviewing AWT referrals and documentation (medical records, IEP, etc.), and then assigning the case to one of his team members. (At this time, Barr oversees six AWT members and has vacancies for two more positions.) Barr also recruits and assesses the technical skills of the applicants for these positions, in addition to interviewing and hiring individuals for the vacancies.

In his former capacity with the agency, Barr handled tasks such as vehicle modifications, home modifications and work site modifications. He also, until 2016, covered AWT vacancies throughout the state as necessary.

The South quadrant covers 61 counties, stretching from Savannah in the east to below Columbus in the west, to the Florida state line in the south. The square mileage of this area exceeds 27,000 miles, almost 50 percent of the size of The Peach State. The area is larger area than 10 states and is almost as big as South Carolina. In addition to this far-reaching size, many portions of

this quadrant are extremely rural and have limited data/telecom connectivity. To deal with these difficulties, Barr and his AWT team utilize video calling/conference technology when deemed appropriate. This strategy can sometimes save team members from traveling a round-trip of 600 miles to see and serve a client.

Regarding procedural specifics, the AWT member nearest the client will meet on site with specialty AWT members (occupational therapist, engineer and technician) for a preliminary assessment by video call. These members will gather significant background information on the case at this time. If necessary, they can meet with the client on site to complete the assessment.

Instances of Barr and the AWT members assisting clients in obtaining/maintaining their employment abound. In one case, the client was a professor at an institution in the state of Georgia. The individual's van had a long history of difficulties, and as a result, the client missed some work.

With VR's guidance, the client purchased a new van with mobility access conversion. VR then provided modified driving equipment that allowed the client to be able to travel reliably to and from work.

In another case, the client owned an aged modified minivan that allowed him to drive independently. However, he was involved in a motor vehicle accident. Consequently, his vehicle was damaged



beyond repair. Subsequently, the client purchased a new van and cost-shared with VR the procurement of modification for wheelchair access and adapted driving equipment. The client was able to complete an internship and secure employment as an attorney.

In both of these cases, the clients were able to obtain/maintain full-time professional employment in salaried positions with benefits.

So when you see or talk to Barr, congratulate him for playing such an important role in helping VR clients procure gainful employment.



Cloudy With a Chance of Success

One Client's Remarkable Journey

By Communications Manager John P. Boan

Dylan Smith knew that he wanted to be a meteorologist, and he knew it wasn't going to be easy. In addition to the high-level math and science involved—subjects daunting for many—Dylan knew that his learning disability would make the uphill climb that much steeper.

But he knew he wouldn't have to do it alone.

While in high school in Clayton, a city in North Georgia, school staff informed Dylan and his mother that he could potentially qualify for Vocational Rehabilitation services, which would provide assistive technology and ensure he had the tools needed to succeed in academia and beyond. With the assistance of a tape recorder and a few new approaches to note taking, Dylan found success in high school, even then knowing full well that if he wanted to move into the field of meteorology, he'd need a higher-level degree.

"Earth science was always my best science. I loved studying the atmosphere and how it worked," he said. "Even when I was a kid, I'd sit and watch storms roll in. It was really fascinating."

While he wanted to stay in Georgia for school, no university in the state offered meteorology as a field of study, so the decision was made that he would instead go to the University of South Alabama. Once enrolled, the work didn't get any easier. Meteorology is considered one of the hardest majors at the school, requiring more credit hours (and a similar workload of math and science courses) as a chemical

engineering degree. Using his assistive technologies and putting in long hours, Dylan was able to complete his degree. Next would come the job market and with it, its own unique set of challenges.

The eight months following his graduation would be filled with job interviews at news stations across the country, and while he had the degree and the knowledge, there was one small thing that kept getting in his way.

"The southern accent was a problem for some folks," Dylan said laughing. "It's how you're perceived by the viewers. Sometimes there's just not much you can do."

It was only a matter of time before what some perceived as a liability became an asset. Beginning in January of this year, it was announced Dylan would be the new morning weatherman on KTAB in Midland, Texas. While the last six months have been busy (Texas is currently leading the nation in the number of tornadoes seen in 2019), Dylan said he's loving every minute of it so far. The joy, he said, comes from taking complex weather patterns and putting them in terms that the average viewer tuning in for the news can understand.

"What I get from meteorology is that every day is going to be completely different. That was what I wanted. A new thing every day. Every day is a new puzzle," he said. "That's the reason I did broadcast. I like taking things that are complicated for the average person and simplifying them so that they can



understand. It's like, 'what am I going to get people to talk about at the watercooler today?'"

In the end, he said, he couldn't have done it without the support of Vocational Rehabilitation, and anyone who is thinking about becoming a client should make the plunge. After all, he said, it might change your life.

"You have to at least give it a shot. Life is 90

percent of what happens to you and 10 percent how you react to it, and you'll never know what you could've done if you didn't try," he said. "It's better to go through life trying. Go meet with VR, and see what they can do for you."



Rebuilding Relationships

GVRA Turns Eye to Provider Relations

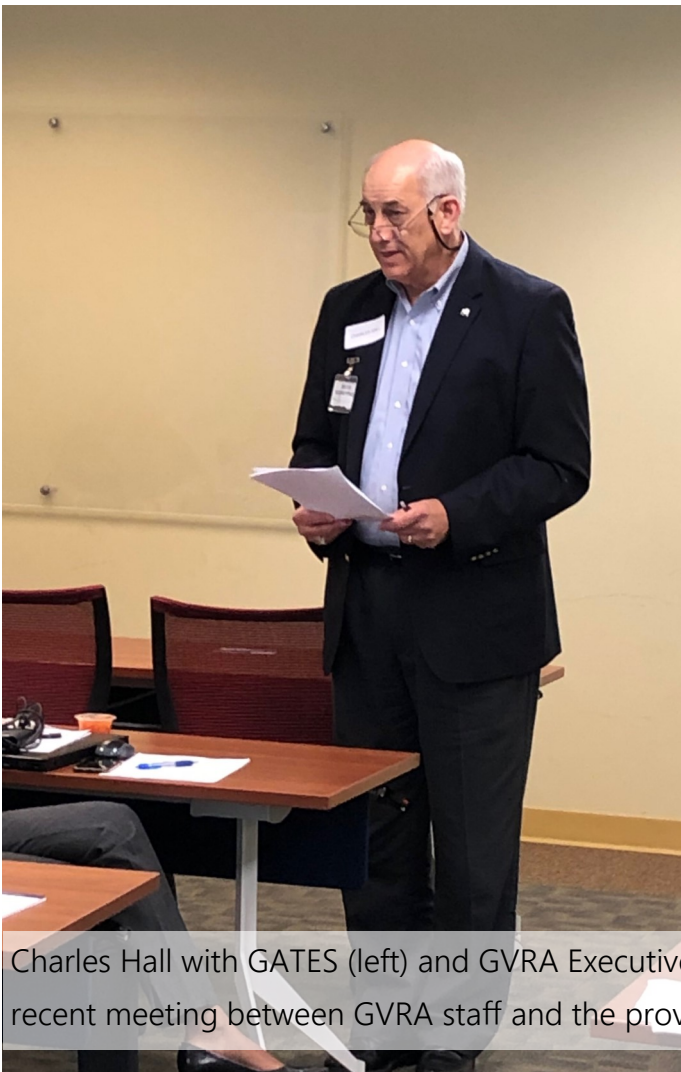
In collaboration with GATES, provider representatives and other stakeholders, a team commissioned by Vocational Services Director Dr. Christine Fleming is currently working to improve services to clients and relations with our providers across the state of Georgia.

Executive Director Shawn Ryan charged the newly-formed group with the responsibility of addressing the concerns of clients, providers and VR staff members. The following leaders will be co-facilitating sub groups with GATES members to address issues which have posed barriers to clients receiving quality services in a timely

manner.

Sharon Angel – Evaluative Metrics including Standards and Policy
KarenLynn Dominy – Competency/ Training for Staff and Providers
CeCe Walker - Information Exchange
Aimee Williams - Billing and Reporting

Denine Woodson will be overseeing this group and is looking to move quickly to address both long and short-term issues. Provider Management impacts every aspect of GVRA services, and these services are critical to the success of the client and to the organization as a whole.



Charles Hall with GATES (left) and GVRA Executive Director Shawn Ryan (right) speak at a recent meeting between GVRA staff and the provider community.



JOB READINESS WORKSHOPS

PRESENTED BY:



GVRA



COBB COUNTY
COMMISSIONER
LISA CUPID



TWO-DAY INTENSIVE JOB READINESS WORKSHOP SERIES FOR VETERANS WITH DISABILITIES

WORKSHOP WILL HIGHLIGHT:

- ★ How to build professional resumes
- ★ How to ace interviews
- ★ Mock interviews
- ★ Networking
- ★ VA claims and appeals
- ★ SSA benefits
- ★ Veterans court
- ★ Federal bonding

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JUNE 26-27

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OR EMAIL DENISE.MILLS@GVS.GA.GOV

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Welcome Aboard!

Welcome Some New Faces to GVRA

If you see the following recent hires at GVRA, please let them know that they're appreciated and make them feel welcome.

They include: Leon Edward Brunty (VR Tifton), Jamila Ife Lane (VR Atlanta), Yolonda Alexandria Dickerson (RWS), Kellee Douglas (VR Milledgeville), Khadika Hoeltke (VR Gainesville), Jameelah Jones Ford (VR Macon), Kayla Symone Boykin (DAS), Melissa Darden (VR Athens), Elise Henley (DAS), Jacobij Leon McGee (DAS), Dequeria Wilson (DAS), Kinyetta Arnold (VR Newnan), Stephanie Hinton (RWS), Ashley Rudolph

(VR Atlanta), LaShawn Spencer (DAS), Tamika Hammond (CSC) and Richard Nelson (VR LaFayette).

In addition, please congratulate Lillian Alesha Flores (Fiscal Services), Alexandra Haynes (VR Atlanta) and Jezree Christian (DAS), who were each promoted this past month.

Again, make sure you make all the new faces at GVRA feel welcome!

Congratulations!

BEP Vendor Gets New Locations



Congrats to BEP Vendor Amir Refoua (pictured center) who was recently awarded the vending contract for the Georgia Legislative, Agriculture and Capitol buildings.





DON'T MISS THIS HIRING BLITZ

Real jobs. Good pay. Offers made the same day.

Who: VR Clients, ages 18 and older interested in warehousing opportunities

What: Job fair offering part-time jobs paying \$15/hr

Where: College Park VR (1630 Phoenix Blvd, College Park 30349)

Convenient options that fit any schedule

Weekdays: M-F

June 10th-14th and June 17th-21st , 4 Sessions/Day

Session 1: 9:00a

Session 2: 11:00a

Session 3: 2:00p

Session 4: 4:00p

Weekend:

One Day ONLY
Saturday, June 15th, 3

Sessions

Session 1: 9:00a

Session 2: 11:00a

Session 3: 1:00p

apply before you attend: amazon.com/atlantajobs

Amended Schedule for 6/10/2019. Transportation is not available for this event. For more information and questions, email **Winston Oluwole** (winston.oluwole@gvs.ga.gov).



On the Radio

GVRA Takes to the Airways

Angelica Sanchez recently came across an opportunity to share and promote the services GVRA has to offer to the Latino Community via live radio. The radio station, Vida Atlanta 102.1 FM, invited her to speak on what GVRA is and what the agency has to offer for people with disabilities who are trying to become active members in the workforce. She brought awareness about GVRA to a large group in the Latino community. She has become an advocate of GVRA and believes it is important to share information to help people know what resources the agency can provide. She is pictured with Vida Atlanta radio host, Jose Manuel.



Sharing Information Together

From the Recent GCB Conference

The Georgia Council of the Blind (GCB) Annual State Conference and Convention was held in the Rutledge area in May 2019.

Keynote speeches were presented by Ray and Karyn Campbell of the American Council of the Blind as well as Lions District Governor Dede deMarks. GVRA staff Shirley Robinson, Assistant Director of Blind Services, Kay McGill, Program Manager for Project Independence: GA Vision Program for Adults Age 55 and Over and Rebecca Cowan- Story, State Coordinator of DeafBlind Services, participated in the conference as well.

Rebecca presented at the Overcoming the Challenge of Dual Sensory Loss session.

Shirley was involved in the Employment Track at the conference, which also included: Hal Simpson, CEO Georgia Blind Sports; Ray Campbell, United Airlines

Employee; and Jack Gilson, Retired Employment Specialist.

Kay participated in the Senior Track at the conference, which also included sessions on fall prevention and using technology.

Community partners presenting at the conference included Zelma Murray, Georgia State Wide Vision Consultant, and Stephanie Woods, Georgia Client Assistance Program.

In addition to the presentations, the conference provided an opportunity for VR Sensory staff to meet with consumers and answer questions. GCB is an affiliate of the American Council of the Blind, which is one of the largest Blind consumer groups in the country.



From left: Kay McGill, Shirley Robinson, GCB Treasurer Marsha Farrow and GCB President Alice Ritchart.



GIB Celebrates 70 Years

Remembering Its Early Days

Later this month, Georgia Industries for the Blind turns 70 years old. What better way, then, to recognize the significance of GIB's history than to step back into its very earliest days. The below article was originally penned in the early 1980s and has been lightly edited for clarity.

"House Bill No. 114, dated March 30, 1937, established the Georgia Factory for the Blind. In Washington, Senate Bill 2819 established the Wagner-O'Day Act, which would pass the House on June 13, 1938. President Roosevelt signed the legislation on June 25 of that year. The National Industries for the Blind was established on August 10, 1938. For organizations to qualify, they must have 75 percent direct blind labor and be a nonprofit organization.

Vaughn Terrell was appointed the first superintendent of GIB. He would supervise the factory in Bainbridge until 1954 when he left to serve in the Georgia General Assembly.

The official opening date of the Bainbridge plant was June 27, 1949. The factory started in some of the old army barracks of Industrial Park. On September 18, 1951, approximately four-and-a-half acres were purchased on Faceville Highway in lots of Land 281 and 282 in the 20th District [This is the existing location of the factory], and it opened for production in December of 1951. On July 1, 1952, rail-road siding with Seaboard Air Line Railroad Company was erected on the east side of building.

In 1953, 24,000 square feet was added to the warehouse, and 9,000 square feet was added to the broom department. In October of 1965, another nearly 2,000 square feet was added for mop storage [In its early days, GIB produced brooms and mops primarily]."

To learn more about the products GIB offers now, please visit www.buygib.com.

Longtime Service

East Quad VR Celebrates Faithful Service

The East Quadrant presented State of Georgia Faithful Service Awards and acknowledged out hardworking and dedicated staff. The event included the following people celebrating milestones with the Agency:

Erica Shedd—15 years

Sacajawea Cooper—10 years

Dixie Morris—30 years

Sherry Harris—25 years

Brittanie Burdette—5 years

Thank you all for your service, and congratulations to those honored.



**“Alone, we can
do so little.
Together, we can
do so much.”
~ Helen Keller**

Thank You

By Communications Manager John Boan

As always, I want to thank everyone who contributed to this month's issue of the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency newsletter. This newsletter wouldn't be possible without the hard work of so many different people working in so many different positions within the organization.

We rely on those who are more client facing to let us know about the good work they're

doing every day, and the stories in each month's newsletter are testament to their hard work and dedication to helping individuals with disabilities find real and meaningful employment.

That's why we do what we do. That's what it's all about.

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